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INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE  
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RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP WASHINGTON DC

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DEPT FOR AF/E, AF/FO  
PARIS FOR D'ELIA

E.O. 12958: N/A  
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SUBJECT: HIGH COURT ANNOUNCES LEGISLATIVE CANDIDATES

REF: ANTANANARIVO 813 AND PREVIOUS

11. (U) On August 23, Madagascar's High Constitutional Court published the official list of candidates for the September 23 National Assembly elections. 1,542 candidates, of whom 666 are former deputies, will compete for 127 seats. President Ravalomanana's Tiako I Madagasikara (TIM) party is the only one with national coverage. Major political parties are concentrating in their traditional geographic support bases and an opposition initiative to launch joint candidates appears to have had limited success. Most candidates are running as independents; many of them nominally TIM members who did not get the party's nomination but are running anyway. This breakdown of party discipline has somewhat encouraged the opposition to think they can win a substantial minority - an outright majority remains unlikely. A dissident wing of TIM called the Committee to Renew TIM (CRT) has put forward 41 of its own candidates.

12. (U) In a move to rein in parliamentarians and cut down on corruption, Prime Minister Rabemananjara announced at a cabinet meeting that National Assembly Deputies will no longer enjoy perks including sport utility vehicles, gas coupons, telephone credits, and free airline tickets. This announcement received strong public approval, although many question whether these changes will stick if the administration needs to woo Deputies in the future.

13. (SBU) COMMENT: As usual, rumors abound in Madagascar that the French are directly or indirectly backing opposition candidates. The President is reportedly hopeful redistricting will help win some seats away from the opposition in Tulear, support base of Jean Lahiniriko's party, and Tamatave, support base of Roland Ratsiraka's party. The extent of malaise within the TIM party is still unclear, but the opposition may have lost its window to take advantage of the internal divisions by failing to resolve leadership issues, articulate a common platform, and launch joint candidates in more districts. END COMMENT.

MARQUARDT